



# **BUDDHISM**

and the

# **GOD - IDEA**

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Edited by  
**Nyanaponika Thera**



# BUDDHISM and the GOD - IDEA

*Presented by -*

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Selected Texts

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## Introduction

Quite contradictory views have been expressed in Western literature on the attitude of Buddhism towards the concept of God and Gods. Hence it was considered useful to gather within the covers of one slender booklet some source material on the subject. Our collection contains quotations from the Discourses of the Buddha as preserved in the Pāli Canon, followed by extracts from Mahāyāna literature.

From these texts it will be seen that the idea of a *personal deity*, a Creator god, conceived to be eternal and omnipotent, is incompatible with the Buddha's teachings. On the other hand, conceptions of an *impersonal godhead* of any description (World-soul, etc.) are excluded by the Buddha's teaching on Anattā (Not-self, unsubstantiality), with which several publications in this series have dealt and will further deal.\*

In Buddhist literature, the belief in a Creator god (*issaranimmāna-vāda*) is frequently mentioned, and rejected, along with other causes wrongly adduced to explain the origin of the world, as for instance, World-soul (*pradhāna*), Time, Nature, etc. God-belief, however, is not placed in the same category as the wrong views which deny moral efficacy of actions, which assume a fortuitous origin of man and nature, or teach absolute determinism; these views are said to be altogether pernicious, having definite bad results (*niyata-micchādiṭṭhi*) due to their effect on ethical conduct.

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\* See "The Wheel" No. 2 "Vedānta and Buddhism"; No. 11, "Anattā and Nibbāna"; No. 20 "The Three Signata".

Theism, however, is regarded as a kind of Karma-teaching (*kammavāda*), in so far as it upholds the moral efficacy of actions. Hence, a Theist, if he leads a moral life, may (like anyone else doing so) expect a favourable rebirth, and possibly one in a heavenly world that resembles his own conceptions of it, though it will not be of eternal duration as he may have expected. If, however, fanaticism induces him to persecute those who do not share his beliefs, this will, of course, have grave consequences for his future destiny. God-belief, though not excluding favourable rebirth, is, as a variety of Eternalism (*sassata-dit̥thi*), an obstacle to final Deliverance. It is an expression of the Craving for continued Existence (*bhava-taṇhā*), the Will to Live; and among the Fetters (*saṃyojana*) that bind to existence, theism is, in particular, subject to those of Personality-belief, Attachment to Rites and Rituals and Desire for Fine-material Existence (or for a "Heaven of the Sense sphere", as the case may be).

As an attempt at explaining the universe, its origin, and man's situation in his world, the God idea has been found entirely unconvincing by the Buddhist thinkers of old. Some of their arguments will be found in the last sections of this brochure, and it should be of interest to compare these with the ways in which Western philosophers have refuted the theological proofs of the existence of God.

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But for an earnest believer, the God idea is more than a mere device for explaining external facts like the origin of the world, etc. It is for him, or is supposed to be, an inner experience that can bestow a strong feeling of certainty not only as to God's existence "somewhere out there", but as

to God's consoling presence and closeness to the devotee. But this "feeling of certainty" requires close scrutiny. Such scrutiny will reveal that in most cases the God-experience is only the devotee's projection of his Ideal (a more or less noble one), and of his fervent wish and deeply felt need to believe. To these projections is given a strong emotional emphasis and they receive "life" through man's powerful capacity of imagination, in the sense of image-forming, visualization, myth-creation, etc. These projections are largely conditioned by the influence of childhood impressions, education, tradition, social environment, etc., and are identified with the images and concepts of whatever religion the devotee follows. In the case of very many of the most sincere believers, a searching self-analysis would show that their "God-experience" has no more specific content than this.

Yet the range and significance of God-belief and God-experience are not fully exhausted by the preceding remarks. The lives and writings of the mystics of all great religions bear witness to religious experiences of great intensity, in which considerable changes are effected in the quality of consciousness. Resulting from profound absorption in prayer or meditation, there is a deepening and widening, a brightening and intensifying of consciousness, mostly accompanied by a transporting feeling of rapture and bliss. The contrast between these states and the norms of conscious awareness is so great that it is understandable if such experiences are believed to be manifestations of the divine. Such experiences are also characterized by a marked reduction or temporary exclusion of the multiplicity of sense perceptions and restless thoughts; and this relative unification of mind is then interpreted as a union or communion with the One God. All these deeply moving



impressions and the first spontaneous interpretations are then identified by the mystic with his particular theology. It is interesting to note, however, that the attempts of most of the great Western mystics to relate their experiences on the mystical level with the official dogmas of their respective Churches often resulted in teachings which were looked upon askance by the orthodox, if not considered downright heretical.

The psychological facts underlying those religious experiences are accepted by the Buddhist, and well known to him: but he distinguishes them carefully from the theological interpretations tacked on to those facts. After rising from deep meditative absorption (*jhāna*), the Buddhist meditator is advised to view the physical and mental factors constituting his experience, in the light of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence: impermanency, liability to suffering, and absence of an abiding ego or eternal substance. This is primarily done in order to utilize the meditative purity and strength of consciousness for the highest purpose: liberating Insight. But this procedure has also a very important side-effect which concerns us here: the meditator will not be overwhelmed by any uncontrolled emotions and thoughts evoked by his singular experience, and will thus be able to avoid interpretations of that experience which are not warranted by the facts.

Hence a Buddhist meditator while benefiting by the refinement of consciousness he has achieved, will be able to see these meditative experiences as what they are: and he will further know that they are without any abiding substance which could be attributed to a deity manifesting itself in the meditator's mind. Therefore, the Buddhist's conclusion



must be that also the highest mystic states do not provide evidence for the existence of a personal God or impersonal Godhead.

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Buddhism has sometimes been called an "atheistic teaching", either in an approving sense (by freethinkers, rationalists, etc.), but more often meant to be disparaging, in the same way as the word "godless" is used as a "smear-word".

Only in one way may Buddhism be described as atheistic, namely in so far as it denies the existence of an eternal, omnipotent God or Godhead who is the creator and ordainer of the world. The word "atheism", however, frequently carries a number of disparaging overtones or implications, which in no way apply to the Buddha's teaching.

Those who use the word "atheism", often associate it with a materialist doctrine that knows nothing higher than this world of the senses and the slight happiness it can bestow. Buddhism is nothing of that sort. In this respect it agrees with other religions that true and lasting happiness cannot be found in this world; nor, as the Buddha adds, on any higher, but still impermanent, plane of existence to which the name of heavenly or divine world is given. However, while the spiritual values advocated by Buddhism are orientated to a state transcending the world, Nibbāna, they do not make a separation between the "Beyond" and the here and now. They have firm roots in the world itself, for they aim at the highest realization in this present existence. Along with such spiritual aspirations Buddhism encourages earnest endeavour to make this world a better place to live in.

The materialistic philosophy of Annihilationism (*uccheda-vāda*) is emphatically rejected by the Buddha as a false doctrine. The doctrine of Kamma is sufficient to prove that Buddhism does not teach annihilation after death; it accepts "survival", not of an eternal soul, but in the sense of renewed becoming, or "rebirth without transmigration". Nor is the Buddha's teaching a nihilism that gives suffering humanity no better hope than a final cold nothingness. Buddhism, on the contrary, is a teaching of salvation (*niyyānika-dhamma*) or deliverance (*vimutti*), and attributes to man the faculty to realize, by his own efforts, the highest goal, Nibbāna, that is the ultimate cessation of suffering and the final eradication of Greed, Hate and Delusion. Nibbāna is far from being the blank Zero of annihilation; nor must it be identified with any form God-idea, as it is neither the origin nor the immanent Ground or Essence of the world.

Buddhism is not an "enemy of religion", as atheism is believed to be. Buddhism indeed is the enemy of none. A Buddhist will recognize and appreciate whatever ethical, spiritual and cultural values have been created by God-belief in its long and checkered history. We cannot, however, close our eyes to the fact that the God-concept has served too often as a cloak for man's will to power and the reckless and cruel use of that power, thus adding considerably to the ample measure of misery in this world supposed to be an all-loving God's creation. For centuries, free thought and free research, and the expression of any dissident views have been obstructed and stifled in the alleged service of God. And alas, these and other negative features are not yet entirely things of the past.

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Furthermore, the word "atheism" carries for many the innuendo that it countenances moral laxity; or that, in any case, its man-made ethics, having no "divine sanction", rest on very shaky foundations. For Buddhism, however, the basic moral law is inherent in life itself; it is just a special case of the law of cause and effect, needing neither a divine law-giver nor depending upon the fluctuating human conceptions of socially-conditioned minor moralities and conventions. For an increasing section of humanity, the belief in God is breaking down rapidly, and along with it also the accustomed motivations for moral conduct. This shows the risk of basing the moral postulates on divine commandments when the alleged source of them rapidly loses credence and authority. There is a need for an autonomous motivation of ethics that has deeper roots than a "social contract" serving the security and protection of individual man and his institutions. Buddhism can offer such a foundation of ethics.

Buddhism, does not deny that there are in the universe planes of existence and levels of consciousness which in some ways, though not necessarily in all respects, are superior to our terrestrial world and to average human consciousness. To deny this, would indeed be a rather provincial outlook in this age of incipient space travel. Bertrand Russell rightly says, "It is improbable that the universe contains nothing better than ourselves".

Yet, according to Buddhist teachings, such higher planes of existence are subject, like our familiar world, to the law of impermanency and change. The inhabitants of such worlds may well be, in different degrees, more powerful than human beings, happier and longer-lived, but not necessarily wiser than man. Whether we call those



superior beings gods, deities, devas or angels is of little importance, since it is improbable that these beings call themselves by any of those names. They are inhabitants of this universe, fellow-wanderers in this round of existence. Further, it need not be denied that such worlds and such beings may have their Lord and Ruler who, as also human rulers do, might, in some cases, be inclined to misjudge his own status and power, until a Greater One comes and points out to him his error, as our texts report of the Buddha.\*

These, however, are largely matters beyond the range and concern of average human experience. They have been mentioned here chiefly for the purpose of defining the Buddhist position, and not to serve as a topic of speculation and argument, which can only divert attention and effort from what ought to be their principal object: the overcoming of Greed, Hatred and Delusion where they are found in the Here and Now.

An ancient verse ascribed to the Buddha in the "Questions of Milinda", says:

"Not far from here you need to look!  
Highest existence—what can it avail?  
Here in this present aggregate,  
In your own body overcome the world!"

**Nyanaponika Thera**

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\* More on this subject of the deities' place in the Buddhist conception of the universe, may be found in an essay by Francis Story, "Of Gods and Men" ('Bodhi Leaves', No. B. 4, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy).

## Origin of the belief in a Creator god

Now there comes a time, brethren, when, sooner or later, after the lapse of a long long period, this world-system passes away. And when this happens beings have mostly been reborn in the World of Radiance, and there they dwell made of mind, feeding on joy, radiating light from themselves, traversing the air, continuing in glory; and thus they remain for a long long period of time.

Now there comes a time, brethren, when, sooner or later, this world-system begins to re-evolve. When this happens the Palace of Brahma appears, but it is empty. And some being or other, either because his span of years has passed or his merit is exhausted, falls from the World of Radiance, and comes to life in the Palace of Brahma. And there also he lives made of mind, feeding on joy, radiating light from himself, traversing the air, continuing in glory; and thus does he remain for a long long period of time.

Now there arises in him, from his dwelling there so long alone, a dissatisfaction and a longing: "O! would that other beings might come to join me in this place!" And just then, either because their span of years had passed or their merit was exhausted, other beings fall from the World of Radiance, and appear in the Palace of Brahma as companions to him, and in all respects like him.

On this brethren, the one who was first reborn thinks thus to himself: "I am Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme One, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the

Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all, appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that are and are to be. These other beings are of my creation. And why is that so? A while ago I thought, 'Would that they might come !' And on my mental aspiration, behold the beings came".

And those beings themselves, too, think thus: "This must be Brahma, the Supreme, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all, appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that are and are to be. And we must have been created by him. And why? Because, as we see it was he who was here first, and we came after that."

On this, brethren, the one who first came into existence there is of longer life, and more glorious, and more powerful than those who appeared after him. And it might well be, brethren, that some being on his falling from that state, should come hither. And having come hither he might go forth from the household life into the homeless state. And having thus become a recluse he, by reason of ardour, of exertion, of application, of earnestness, of careful thought, reaches up to such rapture of heart that, rapt in heart, he calls to mind his last dwelling-place, but not the previous ones. He says to himself: "That illustrious Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme One, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all, appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that are and are to be, he by whom we were created, he is steadfast, immutable, eternal, of a nature that knows no change, and he will remain so for ever and ever. But we who were created by him have come hither as being impermanent, mutable, limited in duration of life.



This, brethren, is the first state of things on account of which, starting out from which, some recluses and Brahmans, being Eternalists as to some things, and Non-eternalists as to others, maintain that the soul and the world are partly eternal and partly not.

*Dīgha-Nikāya, Discourse No. 1;*

*Brahmajāla—Sutta.*

Transl. by Prof. Rhys Davids.

### **The Inexplicable God**

“Well then, Udāyi, what is your own teacher’s doctrine?”

“Our own teacher’s doctrine, venerable sir, says thus: ‘This is the highest splendour! This is the highest splendour!’”—

“But what is that highest splendour, Udāyi, of which your teacher’s doctrine speaks?”—

“It is, venerable sir, a splendour greater and loftier than which there is none. That is the Highest Splendour.”

“But, Udāyi, what is that splendour greater and loftier than which there is none?”—

“It is, venerable sir, that Highest Splendour greater and loftier than which there is none.”—

“For a long time, Udāyi, you can continue in this way, saying, ‘A splendour greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the Highest Splendour’. But still you will not have explained that splendour.

Suppose a man were to say: 'I love and desire the most beautiful woman in this land', and then he is asked: 'Good man, that most beautiful woman whom you love and desire, do you know whether she is a lady from nobility or from a Brahman family or from the trader class or Sudra?' and he replied 'no'.—'Then, good man, do you know her name and that of her clan? Or whether she is tall, short or of middle height, whether she is dark, brunette or golden-skinned, or in what village or town or city she dwells?' and he replied 'no'. And then he is asked: 'Hence, good man, you love and desire what you neither know nor see?', and he answers 'yes'.—What do you think, Udāyi, that being so, would not that man's talk amount to nonsense?"—

"Certainly, venerable sir, that being so, that man's talk would amount to nonsense."—

"But in the same way, you, Udāyi, say, 'A splendour greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the Highest Splendour', and yet you have not explained that splendour."

From *Majjhima - Nikāya No. 79:*  
*Cūḷa - Sakuludāyi Sutta.*

### Blind Faith

"Is there, Vāsettha, a single one of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas who has ever seen Brahma face to face?"

"No, indeed, Gotama."

"Or is there then, Vāsettha, a single one of the teachers of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas, who has seen Brahma face to face?"

"No, indeed, Gotama."

"Or is there then, Vāsettha, a single one of the pupils of the teachers of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas who has seen Brahma face to face?"

"No, indeed, Gotama."

"Or is there then, Vāsettha, a single one of the Brahmans up to the seventh generation who has seen Brahma face to face?"

"No, indeed, Gotama."

"Well then, Vāsettha, those ancient Rishis of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas, the authors of the verses, the utterers of the verses, whose ancient form of words so chanted, uttered or composed, the Brahmans of to-day chant over again and repeat; intoning or reciting exactly as has been intoned or recited—to wit, Atthaka . . . and Bhāgu, did even they speak thus, saying: "We know it, we have seen it, where Brahma is, whence Brahma is, whither Brahma is?"

"Not so, Gotama."

"Then you say, Vāsettha, that none of the Brahmans, or of their teachers, or of their pupils, even up to the seventh generation, has ever seen Brahma face to face. And that even the Rishis of old, the authors and utterers of the verses, of the ancient form of words which the Brahmans of to-day so carefully intone and recite precisely as they have been handed down—even they did not pretend to know or to have seen where or whence or whither Brahma is. So the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas have forsooth said thus: 'What we know not, what we have not



seen, to a state of union with that we can show the way, and can say: 'This is the straight path, this the direct way that makes for salvation, and leads him who acts according to it, into a state of union with Brahma.'

"Now what think you, Vāsettha? Does it not follow, this being so, that the talk of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas, turns out to be foolish talk?"

"In sooth, Gotama, that being so, it follows that the talk of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas is foolish talk."

*The string of blind men*

"Verily, Vāsettha, that Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas should be able to show the way to a state of union with that which they do not know, neither have seen—such a condition of things can in no wise be!

"Just, Vāsettha, as when a string of blind men are clinging one to the other, neither can the foremost see, nor can the middle one see, nor can the hindmost see—just even so, methinks, Vāsettha, is the talk of the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas but blind talk: the first sees not, the middle one sees not, nor can the latest see. The talk then of these Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas turns out to be ridiculous, mere words, a vain and empty thing!

*The staircase to nowhere*

... "Just, Vāsettha, as if a man should make a staircase in the place where four roads cross, to mount up into a mansion. And people should say to him, 'Well, good friend, this mansion, to mount up into which you are

making this staircase, do you know whether it is in the east, or in the south, or in the west, or in the north? whether it is high or low or of middle size?"

"And when so asked he should answer: No.—And people should say to him, 'But then, good friend, you are making a staircase to mount up into something—taking it for a mansion—which, all the while, you know not, neither have seen.' " . . . . .

### *Praying for the Beyond*

"Again, Vāsettha, if this river Aciravati were full of water even to the brim, and overflowing. And a man with business on the other side, bound for the other side, making for the other side, should come up, and want to cross over. And he, standing on this bank, should invoke the further bank, and say, 'Come hither, O further bank! come over to this side!'

"Now what think you, Vāsettha? Would the further bank of the river Aciravati, by reason of that man's invoking and praying and hoping and praising, come over to this side?—

"Certainly not, Gotama."

"In just the same way, Vāsettha, do the Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas—omitting the practice of those qualities which really make man a Brahman, and adopting the practice of those qualities which really make men non-Brahmans—say thus: 'Indra we call upon, Soma we call upon, Varuna, Isāna, Pajāpati, Brahma, Mahiddhi, Yama we call upon.'

“Verily, Vāsetṭha, that those Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas—omitting the practice of those qualities which really make man a Brahman, adopting the practice of those qualities which really make men non-Brahmans—may, by reason of their invoking and praying and hoping and praising, after the breaking up of the body, after death, attain to union with Brahma, such a condition of things can in no wise be.”

From *Dīgha-Nikāya* No. 13: *Tevijjā Sutta*  
 (“Three Vedas”)

Transl. by Prof. Rhys Davids.

### Revealed Religion

.....Again, Sandaka, here some teacher depends on hearsay, takes hearsay for truth, he teaches his doctrine (relying on) legendary lore and scripture. But when, Sandaka, a teacher depends on hearsay, takes hearsay for truth, this he will have heard well and that he will have heard badly, this will be thus and that will be otherwise.

Herein a wise man will consider: ‘This good teacher depends on hearsay, takes hearsay for truth, he teaches his doctrine (relying on) legendary lore and scripture. But when a teacher depends on hearsay, takes hearsay for truth, this he will have heard well and that he will have heard badly, this will be thus and that will be otherwise.’

So when he finds that this kind of religious life is unsatisfactory, he becomes disappointed and leaves it.

This, Sandaka, is the second unsatisfactory religious life declared by the Blessed One who knows and sees, who is the



Arahat, fully enlightened, wherein a wise man certainly would not lead the religious life, or, when leading it, would miss the true path-teaching that is profitable.

From *Majjhima-Nikāya* No. 76: *Sandaka Sutta*.

## The Buddhist Saint (Arahant) and the God Idea

Also a monk who is a Saint (Arahant), canker-free, who has lived the life, accomplished his task, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, who has destroyed what fetters to existence and is liberated through right final knowledge—he, too, has full knowledge of the gods as gods<sup>1</sup>; and knowing them as such, he does not imagine (anything) about the gods<sup>2</sup>, he does not imagine himself among the gods<sup>3</sup>, he does not imagine himself as (originating) from a god<sup>4</sup>, he does not imagine “Mine are the gods”<sup>5</sup>, and he does not find delight in the gods. And why not? Because this has been comprehended by him; and because he is freed from greed through greed’s extinction, freed from hate through hate’s extinction, freed from delusion through delusion’s extinction.

Also a monk who is a Saint, canker-free . . . , he, too, has full knowledge of the Lord of Creatures<sup>6</sup>, as Lord of Creatures; and knowing him as such, he does not imagine (anything) about the Lord of Creatures, he does not imagine (about the qualities) in the Lord of Creatures<sup>7</sup>, he does not imagine himself as (originated) from the Lord of Creatures<sup>8</sup>, he does not imagine “Mine is the Lord of Creatures”<sup>9</sup>, and he does not find delight in the Lord of Creatures. And why not? Because this has been comprehended by him; and because he is freed from greed through

greed's extinction, freed from hate through hate's extinction, freed from delusion through delusion's extinction.

Also a monk who is a Saint (Arahant), canker-free, who has lived the life, accomplished his task, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, who has destroyed what fetters to existence and is liberated through right final knowledge—he, too, has full knowledge of Brahma as Brahma<sup>10</sup>; and knowing him as such, he does not imagine (anything) about Brahma<sup>10</sup>, he does not imagine (about the qualities) in Brahma<sup>11</sup>, he does not imagine himself as (originated) from Brahma<sup>12</sup>, he does not imagine “Mine is Brahma”<sup>13</sup>, and he does not find delight in Brahma.<sup>14</sup> And why not? Because this has been comprehended by him; and because he is freed from greed through greed's extinction, freed from hate through hate's extinction, freed from delusion through delusion's extinction.

From the Discourse on “Root-cause Exposition”  
(*Mūla-pariyāya Sutta*), *Majjhima-Nikāya* No. 1.

1. *deve devato abhijānāti*. In earlier sections of this Discourse, a similar formulation occurs, referring to other terms. In the context, the Commentary to our Discourse explains (and this applies also to our passage): “Without ignoring (the respective term; here: gods, Lord of Creatures, etc.), he knows it distinctly (*abhijānāti*) as impermanent, liable to suffering, void of self and substance.”

2. *deve na maññati*. According to the Commentary, the ‘imagination’ (*maññanā*) which he avoids, appears in three forms, as Craving, Conceit and Wrong Views. These three pertain also to most of the other types of ‘imaginings’

in this para and in the following ones, with exceptions mentioned in the Comy., where only one or two apply, which space does not permit to specify here.

3. *devesu na maññati.*

4. *devato na maññati.*

5. Here we may think, for instance, of tribal deities; the possessiveness exhibited by fetish worshippers, but also by devotees of higher religions.

6. In the Commentary, the Lord of Creatures (*prajāpati*) is identified with Māra who, in Buddhist cosmology, is the ruler over the Paranimmita-vasavatti Gods, "those who wield power over the creations of others".

7. Namely his permanence, immutability; that in him there is no evil, etc. (Comy.)

8. By creation or emanation (Comy.).

9. Thinking, "He is my Lord and Master" (Comy.). The statement of the text may also be applied to the belief that a god-concept adhered to individually or by one's own religion, can claim exclusive validity or superiority.

10. See Notes 1 & 2, respectively.

11. *Brahmasmim maññati.* The Commentary restricts its explanation to imaginings about the qualities or attributes found "in Brahma" (see Note 5). But it appears possible to render the Locative case of the Pali term *Brahmasmim* as literally as the Commentary does with other terms of the Discourse, and to translate by "he imagines himself in Brahma". This, then, would refer to a mystic union with the deity.



12. *Brahmato maññati*. Here, too, the Commentary explains the Ablative case only in the sense of originating from Brahma by way of creation or emanation (see Note 6). But when explaining the parallel phrase applied to other terms, the Commentary mentions an alternative interpretation of the Ablative case, as signifying "different from". The rendering here would then be: "He imagines himself different from Brahma"; and this would refer to a strict dualism of God and Man. One will also be reminded here of those Christian theologians who emphasize the deep gulf between the Creator and creature.

13. See Note 7.

14. Comy. says that he delights (in Brahma) by way of craving (*taṇhā*) and wrong views (*diṭṭhi*), which may be exemplified by the "yearnings for the delights of divine love" and by indulging in theological speculations.

## God Belief and Fatalism

There are ascetics and Brahmans who maintain and believe that whatever a man experiences, be it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, all that is caused by God's act of creation. I went to them and questioned them (whether they held such a view), and when they affirmed it, I said: "If that is so, venerable sirs, then people commit murder, theft and unchaste deeds due to God's act of creation; they indulge in lying, slanderous, harsh and idle talk due to God's act of creation; they are covetous, full of hate and hold wrong views due to God's act of creation."

Those who fall back on God's act of creation as the decisive factor, will lack the impulse and effort for doing this and not doing that. Since for them, in truth and fact, (a necessity for) action or inaction does not obtain, the designation "ascetic" does not fit them who live without mindfulness and self-control.

*Āṅguttara-Nikāya, Tika-nipāta*  
(The Threes), No. 62

If God is the cause of all that happens, what is the use of man's striving?

*Asvaghosa, Buddha-carita 9,53*

## The Transient Deity

As far as suns and moons revolve and the sky's directions brilliantly shine, so far reaches a Thousand-fold World-system. In that Thousand-fold World-system, there are a thousand moons, a thousand suns, a thousand Sinerus, the kings of the mountains, a thousand of the four continents, a thousand of the four oceans, a thousand of the heavenly worlds of the sense plane, and a thousand Brahma-worlds. As far as this Thousand-fold World-system reaches, so far is the Great Brahma deemed the highest there.

But even in that Great Brahma, O monks, there is transformation, there is change. Seeing this, O monks, a well-instructed disciple feels disgust even with that. Being disgusted with it, his attachment even to the highest fades away, how much more to what is low!

*Āṅguttara-Nikāya, Dasaka-Nipāta*  
(The Tens), No. 29

## The Disillusionment of the Gods

Now there arises in the world the Blessed One, who is holy, fully enlightened, endowed with knowledge and pure conduct, sublime, the knower of worlds, the incomparable leader of men in need of guidance, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.

He thus teaches Dhamma: "This is personality; this the origination of personality; this the cessation of personality; this is the way leading to the cessation of personality".

And those gods who are long-lived, resplendent in beauty, who dwell full of happiness and for a long time in lofty heavenly mansions, even they, having heard the Perfect One teaching Dhamma, are mostly beset by fear, agitation and trembling:

"Alas, we who, in fact, are impermanent, believed that we were permanent! We who, in fact, are evanescent, believed that we were ever-lasting! We who, in fact, are non-eternal, believed that we were eternal! But, truly, we are impermanent, evanescent, non-eternal, engrossed in personality!"

*Āṅguttara-Nikāya, Catukka-nipāta*  
(The Fours), No. 33



## Brahma Admits his Transiency

One there is<sup>1</sup> who thought of posing  
 The Divinity<sup>2</sup> this question  
 In Sudhamma Hall in Heaven:  
 'Is there still in thee existing,  
 'Friend, the view that once existed?  
 'Is the radiance of Heaven  
 'Clearly seen by thee as passing?'

The Divinity gave answer  
 Truly to my question's order:  
 'There exists in me no longer,  
 'Sir, the view that once existed;  
 'All the radiance of Heaven  
 'I now clearly see as passing;  
 'I condemn my erstwhile claiming  
 'To be permanent, eternal.,

*Majjhima-Nikāya No. 50*

## God's Responsibility

If there exists some Lord all-powerful to fulfil  
 In every creature bliss or woe, and action good or ill,  
 That Lord is stained with sin. Man does but work his will.

*Mahā-Bodhi Jātaka (No. 528)*  
*(Jātaka Stories, vol. V, p. 122)*

- 
1. Mahā-Moggallāna Thera, a chief disciple of the Buddha
  2. Brahma

He who has eyes can see the sickening sight;  
 Why does not Brahma set his creatures right?  
 If his wide power no limit can restrain,  
 Why is his hand so rarely spread to bless?  
 Why are his creatures all condemned to pain?  
 Why does he not to all give happiness?  
 Why do fraud, lies, and ignorance prevail?  
 Why triumphs falsehood,—truth and justice fail?  
 I count your Brahma one th'unjust among,  
 Who made a world in which to shelter wrong.

*Bhūridatta Jātaka (No. 543)*  
*(Jātaka Stories, Vol. VI, p. 110)*

### Creation and Cause

The assumption that a God (*Īsvara*) is the cause, etc. (of the world), rests upon the false belief in an eternal self; but that belief has to be abandoned, if one has clearly understood that everything is (impermanent, and therefore) subject to suffering.

*Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakośa, 5, 8 (vol. IV, p. 19);*  
*Sphuṭārtha p. 445, 26.*

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A certain School holds that there is a Mahesvara God who is absolute, omnipresent, and eternal; and that he is the creator of all Dharmas (i. e. phenomena).

### Refutation

This theory is illogical. And why?

- (a) That which creates is not eternal; that which is not eternal is not omnipresent; that which is not omnipresent is not absolute.
- (b) Since he is eternal and omnipresent, and complete with all kinds of capacities; he should, in all times and at all places, produce all of a sudden all Dharmas (phenomena).
- (c) (If they say) that his creation depends upon desire and conditions, then they contradict their own doctrine of "unique cause". Alternatively, we may say that desire and conditions should also all arise of a sudden, since the cause (which produces them) is there always.

*Vi jñaptimātratā Siddhi Sastra*

(A Standard Work of the Buddhist Idealistic School)  
Translated from the Chinese version

by Wong Mow Lam

("The Chinese Buddhist", Vol. II, No. 2; Shanghai 1932)

### Sāntideva

The creative nature of one who is incomprehensible must likewise be incomprehensible. Why, then talk about it?

"*Bodhicaryāvatāra*" IX, 121

If the cause (God) has no beginning, how can the effect (God's creation) have a beginning?

*ib.*, IX, 123



Why did (God) not produce always?<sup>1</sup> There is no other person or thing he need consider. For there is no other person or thing he has not created. Why, then, should he thus consider?

*ib.*, IX, 124

If he has to consider the completeness of conditions, then God is not the cause (of the world). For he is then not free<sup>2</sup> to refrain from creating when that completeness of conditions is present; nor is he free to create when it is absent.

*ib.*, IX, 125

If God acts without wishing it, he creates in dependence upon something else; but if he has the wish, then he will be dependent upon that wish. Hence where is the creator's sovereignty?<sup>3</sup>

*ib.*, X, 126

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1. that is: produce the whole creation all at once.

2. lit.: the master, the Lord (*īśā*)

3. These arguments and those in the preceding section from the *Vijñaptimātratā* are elaborated in the following extracts from the *Tattva-Sangraha*.

## Sāntaraksīta

Extracts from the

*Tattva-Sangraha*, The 'Compendium of Truth'

With the Commentary of *Kamalaśīla*

*From Chapter II: Doctrine of God*

### 1. The One and the Many (Paley's "Watchmaker" argument)

The existence of a Being who is eternal, one, and the substratum of eternal all-embracing consciousness,—can never be proved . . . (*Text 72*)

. . . for the simple reason that any Corroborative Instance that might be cited in the form of the Jar and such things, would be lacking in the element of similarity<sup>1</sup> that is essential (the maker of the jar not having all the character that is predicated of God). (*Commentary to 72*)

For instance, all such products as houses, steps, gateways, towers and the like are definitely known to have been fashioned by makers who have been many, and with fleeting ideas. (*Text 73*)

### 2. The Eternal cannot be productive

Eternal things cannot produce any effects, because 'consecutive' action and 'concurrent' action are mutually contradictory; and if objects are consecutive, there must be the same consecutiveness in their cognitions also. (*Text 76*)

. . . . . Only non-eternal things can be productive causes; as it is these alone which go on unceasingly changing their sequential character—of being present now and past at the next moment. Thus it is proved that an Intelligent Maker must be evanescent and many. (*Commentary to 76*)

God's cognitions must be consecutive, because they are related to consecutive cognizable things . . . (*Text 77*)

. . . If God's cognition manifesting itself, is produced by objects which are consecutive, then it becomes proved that it must be consecutive;—if it is not so produced, then, as there would be no proximate contact (with the object and the cognition), God could not cognize the object at all . . . (*Commentary to 77*)

### **3. An unobstructed Divine Cause requires simultaneous creation**

God cannot be the Cause of Born Things, because he is himself devoid of Birth, like the 'Sky-lotus'. Otherwise all things would come into existence simultaneously. (*Text 81*)

. . . If the Cause were one whose efficiency is never obstructed, then all things would come into existence simultaneously . . .

. . . The absurdity (involved in the Theist's position) is to be shown in this manner:—When the Cause is present in its complete form, then the effect must appear as a matter of course; just as it is found in the case of the sprout which appears as soon as the final stage has been



reached by the causal conditions conducive to it. Now under the doctrine of the Theist, as God, the cause of all things, would always be there and free from defects, all things, the whole world, should come into existence at once.

The following argument might be urged:—"God is not the only cause (of all things); in fact, what he does he does through the help of such auxiliary causes as Merit and the rest,—God himself being only the Efficient (Controlling) Cause. So that so long as Merit and the rest are not there, the 'Cause' of things cannot be said to be present there in its efficient form."

This is not valid. If there is help that has got to be rendered to God by the Auxiliary Causes, then he must be regarded as dependent upon their aid. As a matter of fact however, God is (said to be) eternal and as nothing can introduce into him any efficiency that is not there already, there can be no help that he should receive from the auxiliary causes. Why then, should he need such auxiliaries as are of no use to him? . . . .

Uddyotakara has argued as follows:—"Though the cause of things named 'God' is eternal and perfect and always present, yet the producing of things is not simultaneous, because God always acts intelligently and purposely. If God has produced things by his mere presence, without intelligence (and purpose), then the objection urged would have applied to our doctrine. As a matter of fact however, God acts intelligently; hence the objection is not applicable; specially as God operates towards Products solely by his own wish. Thus our reason is not 'inconclusive'."

This is not valid. The activity and inactivity of things are not dependent upon the wish of the Cause; only if it were so, the appearance of all Effects would not be possible even in the constant presence of the untrammelled Cause in the shape of God, simply on account of his wish being absent. The fact of the matter is that the appearance and non-appearance of things are dependent upon the presence and absence of due efficiency in the Cause. For instance, even though a man may have the wish, things do not appear, if he has not the efficiency or power to produce them; and when the Cause in the form of seeds has the efficiency or faculty to produce the sprout, the sprout does appear,—even though the seed has no wish at all. If then the Cause called 'God' is always there fully endowed with the due untrammelled efficiency—as he is at the time of the producing of a particular thing—then why should things stand in need of his wish, which can serve no purpose at all? And the result of this should be that all things should appear simultaneously, at the same time as the appearance of any one thing.—Thus alone could the untrammelled causal efficiency of God be shown, if things were produced simultaneously. Nor can God, who cannot be helped by other things, stand in need of anything, for which he would need his wish.

Further, in the absence of Intelligence, there can be no desire for anything else,—and the Intelligence of God you hold to be eternally uniform; so that, even if God acted intelligently, why should not there be a simultaneous production of things? Because like God himself, his intelligence is always there.—If then, his Intelligence be regarded as evanescent, even so it must co-exist

with God, and its presence must be as constant as God himself; so that the objection on that score remains in force.

... And yet the production of things is not found to be simultaneous; hence the conclusion must be contrary to that desired by the Theist.

The argument may be formulated as follows:—  
 'When a certain thing is not found to be produced at a certain time, it must be taken to be one whose Cause at that time is not untrammelled in its efficiency,—as it is found in the case of the sprout not appearing while the seed is still in the granary; it is found that at the appearance of one thing the whole world is not produced. Hence what has been stated (by the Opponent) as a universal proposition is not found to be true.  
 (Commentary to 87)

*From Chapter VI*  
*Doctrine of the 'Purusha' (Spirit, Personality)*  
*as Cause of the World*

Others, however, postulate the *Purusha* (Spirit) — similar in character to 'God'—as the cause of the world (Text 155).— The refutation of this also is to be set forth in the same manner as that of 'God': For what purpose does this 'Spirit' perform such an act (as the creating, etc., of the world)? (Text 155)

If he does it because he is prompted by another being, then he cannot be self-sufficient (independent). If he does it through compassion, then he should make the world absolutely happy. When he is found to have



created people beset with misery, poverty, sorrow and other troubles,—where can his compassion be perceived? (*Texts 156 - 157*)

Further, inasmuch as, prior to creation, the objects of compassion would not be there, — there could not be even that compassion through the presence of which the Ordainer is assumed. (*Text 158*)

Nor should he bring about the dissolution of those beings who would be always prosperous. If in so doing, he be regarded as dependent upon the 'Unseen Force' (of Destiny), then his 'Self-sufficiency' ceases. (*Text 159*)

It might be argued that — "He makes people happy or unhappy in accordance with their Destiny, in the shape of Merit and Demerit." — That cannot be right; as in that case his self-sufficiency — which has been postulated — would cease. One who is himself endowed with power does not depend upon anything else; if he is wanting in power, then the creation of the world itself might be attributed to that on which he is dependent; and in that case he would cease to be the Cause. (*Commentary to 159*)

Then again, why should he make himself dependent upon that Destiny, which is conducive to suffering and pain? In fact, full of mercy as he is, the right course for him would be to ignore that Destiny. (*Text 160*)

Merciful persons do not seek for such causes as bring about suffering: because the sole motive behind their actions consists in the desire to remove the suffering of others. (*Commentary to 160*)

Translated by Ganganath Jha  
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